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INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, SEXUALITY STUDIES

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Unit I: An Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies: Grounding Theoretical Frameworks and Concepts

Identity Terms

Language is political, hotly contested, always evolving, and deeply personal to each person who chooses the terms with which to identify themselves. To demonstrate respect and awareness of these complexities, it is important to be attentive to language and to honor and use individuals' self-referential terms (Farinas and Farinas 2015). Below are some common identity terms and their meanings. This discussion is not meant to be definitive or prescriptive but rather aims to highlight the stakes of language and the debates and context surrounding these terms, and to assist in understanding terms that frequently come up in classroom discussions. While there are no strict rules about "correct" or "incorrect" language, these terms reflect much more than personal preferences. They reflect individual and collective histories, ongoing scholarly debates, and current politics.



"People of color" vs. "Colored people"

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individuals who are non-white (Safire 1988). It is a political, coalitional term, as it encompasses common experiences of racism. People of color is abbreviated as **POC**. **Black** or **African American** are commonly the preferred terms for most individuals of African descent today. These are widely used terms, though sometimes they obscure the specificity of individuals' histories. Other preferred terms are African diasporic or African descent, to refer, for example, to people who trace their lineage to Africa but migrated through Latin America and the Caribbean. **Colored people** is an antiquated term used before the civil rights movement in the United States and the United Kingdom to refer pejoratively to individuals of African descent. The term is now taken as a slur, as it represents a time when many forms of institutional racism during the Jim Crow era were legal.

"Disabled people" vs. "People with disabilities"

Some people prefer person-first phrasing, while others prefer identity-first phrasing. **People-first language** linguistically puts the person before their impairment (physical, sensory or mental difference). Example: "a woman with a vision impairment." This terminology encourages **nondisabled** people to think of those with disabilities as people (Logsdon 2016). The acronym PWD stands for "people with disabilities." Although it aims to humanize, people-first language has been critiqued for aiming to create distance from the impairment, which can be understood as devaluing the impairment. Those who prefer **identity-first language**

often emphasize embracing their impairment as an integral, important, valued aspect of themselves, which they do not want to distance themselves from. Example: “a *disabled person*.” Using this language points to how society disables individuals (Liebowitz 2015). Many terms in common use have ableist meanings, such as evaluative expressions like “lame,” “retarded,” “crippled,” and “crazy.” It is important to avoid using these terms. Although in the case of disability, both people-first and disability-first phrasings are currently in use, as mentioned above, this is not the case when it comes to race.

“Transgender,” vs. “Transgendered,” “Trans,” “Trans*,” “Non-binary,” “Genderqueer,” “Genderfluid,” “Agender,” “Transsexual,” “Cisgender,” “Cis”

Transgender generally refers to individuals who identify as a gender not assigned to them at birth. The term is used as an adjective (i.e., “a transgender woman,” not “a transgender”), however some individuals describe themselves by using transgender as a noun. The term **transgendered** is not preferred because it emphasizes ascription and undermines self-definition. **Trans** is an abbreviated term and individuals appear to use it self-referentially these days more often than **transgender**. **Transition** is both internal and social. Some individuals who transition do not experience a change in their gender identity since they have always identified in the way that they do. **Trans*** is an all-inclusive umbrella term which encompasses all nonnormative gender identities (Tompkins 2014). **Non-binary** and **genderqueer** refer to gender identities beyond binary identifications of man or woman. The term genderqueer became popularized within queer and trans communities in the 1990s and 2000s, and the term non-binary became popularized in the 2010s (Roxie 2011). **Agender**, meaning “without gender,” can describe people who do not have a gender identity, while others identify as non-binary or gender neutral, have an undefinable identity, or feel indifferent about gender (Brooks 2014). **Genderfluid** people experience shifts between gender identities. The term **transsexual** is a medicalized term, and indicates a binary understanding of gender and an individual’s identification with the “opposite” gender from the gender assigned to them at birth. **Cisgender** or **cis** refers to individuals who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. Some people prefer the term **non-trans**. Additional gender identity terms exist; these are just a few basic and commonly used terms. Again, the emphasis of these terms is on viewing individuals as they view themselves and using their self-designated names and pronouns.

“Queer,” “Bisexual,” “Pansexual,” “Polyamorous,” “Asexual,”

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a catch-all term for all **LGBTQ** (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) in a derogatory way, but was reclaimed as a self-identifier. However, today, some still feel personally insulted by it and disapprove of its use. **Bisexual** is typically defined as a sexual orientation marked by attraction to either men or women. This has been problematized as a binary approach to sexuality, which excludes individuals who do not identify as men or women. **Pansexual** is a sexual identity marked by sexual attraction to people of any gender or sexuality. **Polyamorous** (**poly**, for short) or **non-monogamous** relationships are open or non-exclusive; individuals may have multiple consensual and individually-negotiated sexual and/or romantic relationships at once (Klesse 2006). **Asexual** is an identity marked by a lack of or rare sexual attraction, or low or absent interest in sexual activity, abbreviated to “**ace**” (Decker 2014). Asexuals distinguish between sexual and **romantic attraction**, delineating various sub-identities included under an **ace umbrella**. In several later sections of this book, we discuss the terms **heteronormativity**, **homonormativity**, and **homonationalism**; these terms are not self-referential identity descriptors but are used to describe how sexuality is constructed in society and the politics around such constructions.

“Latino,” “Latin American,” “Latina,” “Latino/a,” “Latin@,” “Latinx,” “Chicano,” “Xicano,” “Chicana,” “Chicano/a,” “Chican@,” “Chicanx,” “Mexican American,” “Hispanic”

Latino is a term used to describe people of Latin American origin or descent in the United States, while **Latin American** describes people in Latin America. **Latino** can refer specifically to a man of Latin American origin or descent; **Latina** refers specifically to a woman of Latin American origin or descent.

cally to a woman of Latin American origin or descent. The terms **Latino/a** and **Latin@** include both the -o and -a endings to avoid the sexist use of “Latino” to refer to all individuals. **Chicano**, **Chicano/a**, and **Chican@** similarly describe people of Mexican origin or descent in the United States, and may be used interchangeably with **Mexican American**, **Xicano** or **Xicano/a**. However, as **Chicano** has the connotation of being politically active in working to end oppression of Mexican Americans, and is associated with the Chicano literary and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, people may prefer the use of either **Chicano** or **Mexican American**, depending on their political orientation. **Xicano** is a shortened form of Mexicano, from the Nahuatl name for the indigenous Mexica Aztec Empire. Some individuals prefer the **Xicano** spelling to emphasize their indigenous ancestry (Revilla 2004). **Latinx** and **Chicanx** avoid either the -a or the -o gendered endings to explicitly include individuals of all genders (Ramirez and Blay 2017). **Hispanic** refers to the people and nations with a historical link to Spain and to people of country heritage who speak the Spanish language. Although many people can be considered both Latinx and Hispanic, Brazilians, for example, are Latin American but neither Hispanic nor Latino, while Spaniards are Hispanic but not Latino. Preferred terms vary regionally and politically; these terms came into use in the context of the Anglophone-dominated United States.

“Indigenous,” “First Nations,” “Indian,” “Native,” “Native American,” “American Indian,” “Aboriginal”

Indigenous refers to descendants of the original inhabitants of an area, in contrast to those that have settled, occupied or colonized the area (Turner 2006). Terms vary by specificity; for example, in Australia, individuals are **Aboriginal**, while those in Canada are **First Nations**. “**Aboriginal**” is sometimes used in the Canadian context, too, though more commonly in settler-government documents, not so much as a term of self-definition. In the United States, individuals may refer to themselves as **Indian**, **American Indian**, **Native**, or **Native American**, or, perhaps more commonly, they may refer to their specific tribes or nations. Because of the history of the term, “**Indian**,” like other reclaimed terms, outsiders should be very careful in using it.

“Global South,” “Global North,” “Third world,” “First world,” “Developing country,” “Developed country”

Global South and **Global North** refer to socioeconomic and political divides. Areas of the **Global South**, which are typically socioeconomically and politically disadvantaged are Africa, Latin America, parts of Asia, and the Middle East. Generally, **Global North** areas, including the United States, Canada, Western Europe and parts of East Asia, are typically socioeconomically and politically advantaged. Terms like **Third world**, **First world**, **Developing country**, and **Developed country** have been problematized.

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power are valued over those with less re-
h carry the same problematic connota-
world has been problematized, some
people do not see **Third world** as a negative term and use it self-referentially. Also, **Third world** was historically used as an oppositional and coalitional term for nations and groups who were non-aligned with either the capitalist **First world** and communist **Second world** especially during the Cold War. For example, those who participated in the **Third World Liberation Strike** at San Francisco State University from 1968 to 1969 used the term to express solidarity and to establish Black Studies and the Ethnic Studies College (Springer 2008). We use certain terms, like **Global North/South**, throughout the book, with the understanding that there are problematic aspects of these usages.

“Transnational,” “Diasporic,” “Global,” “Globalization”

Transnational has been variously defined. Transnational describes migration and the transcendence of borders, signals the diminishing relevance of the nation-state in the current iteration of globalization, is used interchangeably with **diasporic** (any reference to materials from a region outside its current location), designates a form of neocolonialism (e.g., transnational capital) and signals the NGOization of social movements. For Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001), the terms “transnational women’s movements” or “global women’s movements” are used to refer to U.N. conferences on women, global feminism as a policy and activist arena, and human rights initiatives that enact new forms of governmentality. Chandra Mohanty (2003) has argued that

transnational feminist scholarship and social movements critique and mobilize against globalization, capitalism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and non-national institutions like the World Trade Organization. In this sense, transnational refers to “cross-national solidarity” in feminist organizing. Grewal and Caplan (2001) have observed that transnational feminist inquiry also examines how these movements have been tied to colonial processes and imperialism, as national and international histories shape transnational social movements. In feminist politics and studies, the term transnational is used much more than “international,” which has been critiqued because it centers the nation-state. Whereas transnational can also take seriously the role of the state it does not assume that the state is the most relevant actor in global processes. Although all of these are technically global processes, the term “global” is oftentimes seen as abstract. It appeals to the notion of “global sisterhood,” which is often suspect because of the assumption of commonalities among women that often times do not exist.

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